THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD

.. D. H. LAWRENCE ..

1914

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THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

D. H. LAWRENCE

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INTRODUCTION

D. H. LAWRENCE is one of the most significant of the new generation of writers just beginning to appear in England. One of their chief marks is that they seem to step forward full-grown, without a history to account for their maturity. Another characteristic is that they frequently spring from social layers which in the past had to remain largely voiceless. And finally, they have all in their blood what their elders had to acquire painfully: that is, an evolutionary conception of life.

Three years ago the author of "The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd" was wholly unknown, having not yet published a single work. To-day he has to his credit three novels — "The White Peacock," "The Trespasser" and "Sons and Lovers" — a collection of verse entitled "Love Poems," and the play contained in this volume. All of these works, but in particular the play and the latest novel, prove their author a man gifted with a strikingly original vision, a keen sense of beauty, an equally keen sense of verbal values, and a sincerity which makes him see and tell the truth where even the most audacious used to falter in the past. Flaubert himself was hardly less free from the old curse of sentimentalizing compromise — and yet this young writer knows how to tell the utmost truth with a daintiness that puts offence out of the question.

He was born twenty-seven years ago in a coal-miner's cottage at the little colliery town of Eastwood, on the border line between Nottingham and Derbyshire. The home was poor, yet not without certain aspirations and refinements. It was the mother who held it together, who saved it from a still more abject poverty, and who filled it with a spirit that made it possible for the boy — her youngest son — to keep alive the gifts still slumbering undiscovered within him. In "Sons and Lovers" we get the picture of just such a home and such a mother, and it seems safe to conclude that the novel in question is in many ways autobiographical.

At the age of twelve the boy won a County Council Scholarship — and came near having to give it up because he found that the fifteen pounds a year conferred by it would barely pay the fees at the Nottingham High School and the railway fares to that city. But his mother's determination and self-sacrifice carried him safely past the seemingly impossible. At sixteen he left school to earn his living as a clerk. Illness saved him from that uncongenial fate. Instead he became a teacher, having charge of a class of colliers' boys in one of those rough, old-fashioned British schools where all the classes used to fight against one another within a single large room. Before the classes convened in the morning, at eight o'clock, he himself received instruction from the head-master; at night he continued his studies in the little kitchen at home, where all the rest of the family were wont to foregather. At nineteen he found himself, to his own and everybody else's astonishment, the first on the list of the King's Scholarship examination, and from that on he was, to use his own words, "considered clever." But the lack of

twenty pounds needed in a lump sum to pay the entrance fee at the training college for teachers made it impossible for him to make use of the gained advantage.

Two years later, however, he succeeded in matriculating at the Nottingham Day Training College. But by that time the creative impulse had already begun to stir within him, aided by an early love affair, and so he wrote poems and worked at his first novel when he should have been studying. At twenty-three he left the college and went to London to teach school, to study French and German, and to write. At twenty-five he had his first novel — "The White Peacock" — accepted and printed. But the death of his mother only a month before that event made his victory seem useless and joyless. After the publication of his second novel, in 1912, he became able to give up teaching in order to devote himself entirely to his art. Out of that leisure — and perhaps also out of the sorrow caused by the loss of her who until then had been the mainspring of his life — came "Sons and Lovers" and "The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd."

What has struck me most deeply in these two works — apart from their splendid craftsmanship — is their psychological penetration, so closely paralleling the most recent conclusions of the world's leading thinkers. In the hands of this writer, barely emerged out of obscurity, sex becomes almost a new thing. Not only the relationship between man and woman, but also that of mother and child is laid bare in a new light which startles — or even shocks — but which nevertheless compels acceptance. One might think that Mr. Lawrence had carefully studied and employed the very latest theories of such men as Freud, for instance, and

yet it is a pretty safe bet that most of his studies have been carried on in his own soul, within his own memories. Thus it is proved once more that what the student gropingly reasons out for abstract formulation is flashed upon the poetic dreamer in terms of living reality.

Another thing that has impressed me is the aspect in which Mr. Lawrence presents the home life of those hitherto submerged classes which are now at last reaching out for a full share in the general social and cultural inheritance. He writes of that life, not only with a knowledge obtained at first hand, but with a sympathy that scorns any apologetic phrase-mongering. Having read him, one feels inclined to conclude, in spite of all conflicting testimony, that the slum is not a location, but a state of mind, and that everywhere, on all levels, the individual soul may create around itself an atmosphere expressive of its ideals. A book like " Sons and Lovers " ought to go far to prove that most of the qualities held peculiar to the best portion of the " ruling classes " are nothing but the typical marks of normal humanity.

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN.

THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD

PERSONS

Mrs. Holroyd
Holroyd
Blackmore
Jack Holroyd
Minnie Holroyd
Grandmother
Rigley
Clara
Laura
Manager
Two Miners

THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE I

The kitchen of a miner's small cottage. On the left is the fireplace, with a deep, full red fire. At the back is a white-curtained window, and beside it the outer door of the room. On the right, two white wooden stairs intrude into the kitchen below the closed stair-foot door. On the left, another door.

The room is furnished with a chintz-backed sofa under the window, a glass-knobbed painted dresser on the right, and in the centre, toward the fire, a table with a red and blue check tablecloth. On one side of the hearth is a wooden rocking-chair, on the other an arm-chair of round staves. An unlighted copper-shaded lamp hangs from the raftered ceiling. It is dark twilight, with the room full of warm fireglow. A woman enters from the outer door. As she leaves the door open behind her, the colliery rail can be seen not far from the threshold, and, away back, the headstocks of a pit.

The woman is tall and voluptuously built. She carries a basket heaped full of washing, which she has just taken from the clotheslines outside. Setting down the basket heavily, she feels among the clothes.

She lifts out a white heap of sheets and other linen, setting it on the table; then she takes a woollen shirt in her hand.

MRS. HOLROYD (*aloud, to herself*)

You know they 're not dry even now, though it 's been as fine as it has. (*She spreads the shirt on the back of her rocking-chair, which she turns to the fire*)

VOICE (*calling from outside*)

Well, have you got them dry?

[*Mrs. Holroyd starts up, turns and flings her hand in the direction of the open door, where appears a man in blue overalls, swarfed and greased. He carries a dinner-basket.*

MRS. HOLROYD

You — you — I don't know what to call you! The idea of shouting at me like that — like the Evil One out of the darkness!

BLACKMORE

I ought to have remembered your tender nerves. Shall I come in?

MRS. HOLROYD

No — not for your impudence. But you 're late, are n't you?

BLACKMORE

It 's only just gone six. We electricians, you know, we 're the gentlemen on a mine: ours is gentlemen's work. But I 'll bet Charles Holroyd was home before four.

MRS. HOLROYD (*bitterly*)

Ay, and gone again before five.

BLACKMORE

But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing! — Where 's he gone?

MRS. HOLROYD (*contemptuously*)

Dunno! He 'd got a game on somewhere — toffed himself up to the nines, and skedaddled off as brisk as a turkey-cock. (*She smirks in front of the mirror hanging on the chimney-piece, in imitation of a man brushing his hair and moustache and admiring himself*)

BLACKMORE

Though turkey-cocks are n't brisk as a rule. Children playing?

MRS. HOLROYD (*recovering herself, coldly*)

Yes. And they ought to be in. (*She continues placing the flannel garments before the fire, on the fender and on chair-backs, till the stove is hedged in with a steaming fence; then she takes a sheet in a bundle from the table, and going up to Blackmore, who stands watching her, says*) Here, take hold, and help me fold it.

BLACKMORE

I shall swarf it up.

MRS. HOLROYD (*snatching back the sheet*)

Oh, you 're as tiresome as everybody else.

BLACKMORE (*putting down his basket and moving to door on right*)

Well, I can soon wash my hands.

MRS. HOLROYD (*ceasing to flap and fold pillowcases*)

That roller-towel 's ever so dirty. I 'll get you another. (*She goes to a drawer in the dresser, and then back toward the scullery, where is a sound of water*)

BLACKMORE

Why, bless my life, I 'm a lot dirtier than the towel. I don't want another.

MRS. HOLROYD (*going into the scullery*)

Here you are.

BLACKMORE (*softly, now she is near him*)

Why did you trouble now? Pride, you know, pride, nothing else.

MRS. HOLROYD (*also playful*)

It 's nothing but decency.

BLACKMORE (*softly*)

Pride, pride, pride!

[*A child of eight suddenly appears in the doorway.*

JACK

Oo, how dark!

MRS. HOLROYD (*hurrying agitated into the kitchen*)

Why, where have you been — what have you been doing now?

JACK (*surprised*)

Why — I 've only been out to play.

MRS. HOLROYD (*still sharply*)

And where 's Minnie?

[*A little girl of six appears by the door.*

MINNIE

I 'm here, mam, and what do you think —?

MRS. HOLROYD (*softening, as she recovers equanimity*)

Well, and what should I think?

JACK

Oh, yes, mam — you know my father —?

MRS. HOLROYD (*ironically*)

I should hope so.

MINNIE

We saw him dancing, mam, with a paper bonnet.

MRS. HOLROYD
What — ?

JACK
There 's some women at "New Inn," what 's come from Nottingham —

MINNIE
An' he 's dancin' with the pink one.

JACK
Shut up our Minnie. An' they 've got paper bonnets on —

MINNIE
All colors, mam!

JACK (*getting angry*)
Shut up our Minnie! An' my dad 's dancing with her.

MINNIE
With the pink-bonnet one, mam.

JACK
Up in the club-room over the bar.

MINNIE
An' she 's a lot littler than him, mam.

JACK (*piteously*)
Shut up our Minnie— An' you can see 'em go past the window, 'cause there is n't no curtains up, an' my father 's got the pink bonnet one —

MINNIE
An' there 's a piano, mam —

JACK
An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD (*she has been lighting the lamp, and holds the lamp-glass*)
And who else is there?

MINNIE

Some more men — an' *all* the women with paper bonnets on.

JACK

There 's about ten, I should think, an' they say they came in a brake from Nottingham.

[*Mrs. Holroyd, trying to replace the lamp-glass over the flame, lets it drop on the floor with a smash.*

JACK

There, now — now we 'll have to have a candle.

BLACKMORE (*appearing in the scullery doorway with the towel*) What 's that — the lamp-glass?

JACK

I never knowed Mr. Blackmore was here.

BLACKMORE (*to Mrs. Holroyd*)

Have you got another?

MRS. HOLROYD

No. (*There is silence for a moment*) We can manage with a candle for to-night.

BLACKMORE (*stepping forward and blowing out the smoky flame*) I 'll see if I can't get you one from the pit. I shan't be a minute.

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't — don't bother — I don't want you to.

[*He, however, unscrews the burner and goes.*

MINNIE

Did Mr. Blackmore come for tea, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD

No; he 's had no tea.

JACK

I bet he 's hungry. Can I have some bread?

MRS. HOLROYD (*she stands a lighted candle on the table*) Yes, and you can get your boots off to go to bed.

JACK

It 's not seven o'clock yet.

MRS. HOLROYD

It does n't matter.

MINNIE

What do they wear paper bonnets for, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD

Because they 're brazen hussies.

JACK

I saw them having a glass of beer.

MRS. HOLROYD

A nice crew!

JACK

They say they are old pals of Mrs. Meakins. You could hear her screaming o' laughin', an' my dad says: " He-ah, missis — here — a dog's-nose for the Dachess — hopin' it 'll smell samthing " — What 's a dog's-nose?

MRS. HOLROYD (*giving him a piece of bread and butter*) Don't ask me, child. How should I know?

MINNIE

Would she eat it, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD

Eat what?

MINNIE

Her in the pink bonnet — eat the dog's nose?

MRS. HOLROYD

No, of course not. How should I know what a dog's-nose is?

JACK

I bet he 'll never go to work to-morrow, mother — will he?

MRS. HOLROYD

Goodness knows. I 'm sick of it — disgracing me. There 'll be the whole place cackling *this* now. They 've no sooner finished about him getting taken up for fighting than they begin on this. But I 'll put a stop to it some road or other. It 's not going on, if I know it: it is n't.

[*She stops, hearing footsteps, and Blackmore enters.*

BLACKMORE

Here we are then — got one all right.

MINNIE

Did they give it you, Mr. Blackmore?

BLACKMORE

No, I took it.

[*He screws on the burner and proceeds to light the lamp. He is a tall, slender, mobile man of twenty-seven, brown-haired, dressed in blue overalls. Jack Holroyd is a big, dark, ruddy, lusty lad. Minnie is also big, but fair.*

MINNIE

What do you wear blue trousers for, Mr. Blackmore?

BLACKMORE

They 're to keep my other trousers from getting greasy.

MINNIE

Why don't you wear pit-breeches, like dad's?

JACK

'Cause he 's a 'lectrician. Could you make me a little injun what would make electric light?

BLACKMORE

I will, some day.

JACK

When?

MINNIE

Why don't you come an' live here?

BLACKMORE (*looking swiftly at Mrs. Holroyd*)

Nay, you 've got your own dad to live here.

MINNIE (*plaintively*)

Well, you could come as well. Dad shouts when we 've gone to bed, an' thumps the table. He would n't if you was here.

JACK

He durs n't —

MRS. HOLROYD

Be quiet now, be quiet. Here, Mr. Blackmore. (*She again gives him the sheet to fold*)

BLACKMORE

Your hands *are* cold.

MRS. HOLROYD

Are they? — I did n't know.

[*Blackmore puts his hand on hers.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*confusedly, looking aside*)

You must want your tea.

BLACKMORE

I 'm in no hurry.

MRS. HOLROYD

Selvidge to selvidge. You 'll be quite a domestic man, if you go on.

BLACKMORE

Ay.

[*They fold the two sheets.*

BLACKMORE

They are white, your sheets!

MRS. HOLROYD

But look at the smuts on them — look! This vile hole! I 'd never have come to live here, in all the thick of the pit-grime, and lonely, if it had n't been for him, so that he should n't call in a public-house on his road home from work. And now he slinks past on the other side of the railway, and goes down to the New Inn instead of coming in for his dinner. I might as well have stopped in Bestwood.

BLACKMORE

Though I rather like this little place, standing by itself.

MRS. HOLROYD

Jack, can you go and take the stockings in for me? They 're on the line just below the pigsty. The prop 's near the apple-tree — mind it. Minnie, you take the peg-basket.

MINNIE

Will there be any rats, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD

Rats — no. They 'll be frightened when they hear you, if there are.

[*The children go out.*

BLACKMORE

Poor little beggars!

MRS. HOLROYD

Do you know, this place is fairly alive with rats. They run up that dirty vine in front of the house — I 'm always at him to cut it down — and you can hear them at night overhead like a regiment of soldiers tramping. Really, you know, I *hate* them.

BLACKMORE

Well — a rat is a nasty thing!

MRS. HOLROYD

But I s'll get used to them. I 'd give anything to be out of this place.

BLACKMORE

It *is* rotten, when you 're tied to a life you don't like. But I should miss it if you were n't here. When I 'm coming down the line to the pit in the morning — it 's nearly dark at seven now — I watch the fire-light in here — Sometimes I put my hand on the wall outside where the chimney runs up to feel it warm — There is n't much in Bestwood, is there?

MRS. HOLROYD

There 's less than nothing if you can't be like the rest of them — as common as they 're 'made.

BLACKMORE

It 's a fact — particularly for a woman — But this place is cosy — God love me, I 'm sick of lodgings.

MRS. HOLROYD

You 'll have to get married — I 'm sure there are plenty of nice girls about.

BLACKMORE

Are there? I never see 'em. (*He laughs*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, come, you can't say that.

BLACKMORE

I 've not seen a single girl — an unmarried girl — that I should want for more than a fortnight — not one.

MRS. HOLROYD

Perhaps you 're very particular.

[*She puts her two palms on the table and leans back. He draws near to her, dropping his head.*

BLACKMORE

Look here!

[*He has put his hand on the table near hers.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, I know you 've got nice hands — but you need n't be vain of them.

BLACKMORE

No — it 's not that — But don't they seem — (*he glances swiftly at her; she turns her head aside; he laughs nervously*) — they sort of go well with one another. (*He laughs again*)

MRS. HOLROYD

They *do*, rather —

[*They stand still, near one another, with bent heads, for a moment. Suddenly she starts up and draws her hand away.*

BLACKMORE

Why — what is it?

[*She does not answer. The children come in — Jack with an armful of stockings, Minnie with the basket of pegs.*

JACK

I believe it 's freezing, mother.

MINNIE

Mr. Blackmore, could you shoot a rat an' hit it?

BLACKMORE (*laughing*)

Shoot the lot of 'em, like a wink.

MRS. HOLROYD

But you 've had no tea. What an awful shame to keep you here!

BLACKMORE

Nay, I don't care. It never bothers me.

MRS. HOLROYD

Then you 're different from most men.

BLACKMORE

All men are n't alike, you know.

MRS. HOLROYD

But do go and get some tea.

MINNIE (*plaintively*)

Can't you stop, Mr. Blackmore?

BLACKMORE

Why, Minnie?

MINNIE

So 's we 're not frightened. Yes, do. Will you?

BLACKMORE

Frightened of what?

MINNIE

'Cause there 's noises, an' rats, — an' perhaps dad 'll come home and shout.

BLACKMORE

But he 'd shout more if I was here.

JACK

He does n't when my uncle John 's here. So you stop, an' perhaps he won't.

BLACKMORE

Don't you like him to shout when you 're in bed?

[*They do not answer, but look seriously at him.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The same scene, two hours later. The clothes are folded in little piles on the table and the sofa. Mrs. Holroyd is folding a thick flannel undervest or singlet which her husband wears in the pit and which has just dried on the fender.

MRS. HOLROYD (*to herself*)

Now thank goodness they 're all dried. It 's only nine o'clock, so he won't be in for another two hours, the nuisance. (*She sits on the sofa, letting her arms hang down in dejection. After a minute or two she jumps up, to begin rudely dropping the piles of washed clothes in the basket*) I don't care, I 'm not going to let him have it all *his* way — no! (*She weeps a little, fiercely, drying her eyes on the edge of her white apron*) Why should *I* put up with it all? — *He* can do what he likes. But I don't care, no, I don't — [*She flings down the full clothes-basket, sits suddenly in the rocking-chair, and weeps. There is the sound of coarse, bursting laughter, in vain subdued, and a man's deep guffaws. Footsteps draw near. Suddenly the door opens, and a little, plump, pretty woman of thirty, in a close-fitting dress and a giddy, frilled bonnet of pink paper, stands perkily in the doorway. Mrs. Holroyd springs up: her small, sensitive nose is inflamed with weeping, her eyes are wet and flashing. She fronts the other woman.*

CLARA (*with a pert smile and a jerk of the head*)

Good evenin'!

MRS. HOLROYD

What do you want?

CLARA (*she has a Yorkshire accent*)

Oh, we 've not come beggin' — this is a visit.

[*She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth in a little snorting burst of laughter. There is the sound of another woman behind going off into uncontrollable laughter, while a man guffaws.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*after a moment of impotence — tragically*) What — !

CLARA (*faltering slightly, affecting a polite tone*)

We thought we 'd just call —

[*She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her explosive laughter — the other woman shrieks again, beginning high, and running down the scale.*

MRS. HOLROYD

What do you mean? — What do you want here?

CLARA (*she bites her lip*)

We don't want anything, thanks. We 've just called. (*She begins to laugh again — so does the other*) Well, I don't think much of the manners in this part of the country. (*She takes a few hesitating steps into the kitchen*)

MRS. HOLROYD (*trying to shut the door upon her*)

No, you are not coming in.

CLARA (*preventing her closing the door*)

Dear me, what a to-do! (*She struggles with the door. The other woman comes up to help; a man is seen in the background*)

LAURA

My word, are n't we good enough to come in?

[*Mrs. Holroyd, finding herself confronted by what*

seems to her excitement a crowd, releases the door and draws back a little — almost in tears of anger.

MRS. HOLROYD

You have no business here. What do you want?

CLARA (*putting her bonnet straight and entering in brisk defiance*) I tell you we 've only come to see you. (*She looks round the kitchen, then makes a gesture toward the armchair*) Can I sit here? (*She plumps herself down*) Rest for the weary.

[*A woman and a man have followed her into the room. Laura is highly colored, stout, some forty years old, wears a blue paper bonnet, and looks like the landlady of a public-house. Both she and Clara wear much jewellery. Laura is well dressed in a blue cloth dress. Holroyd is a big blond man. His cap is pushed back, and he looks rather tipsy and lawless. He has a heavy blond moustache. His jacket and trousers are black, his vest gray, and he wears a turn-down collar with dark bow.*

LAURA (*sitting down in a chair on right, her hand on her bosom, panting*) I 've laughed till I feel fair bad.

CLARA

'Ave n't you got a drop of nothink to offer us, mester? Come, you are slow. I should 'ave thought a gentleman like you would have been out with the glasses afore we could have got breaths to ask you.

HOLROYD (*clumsily*)

I dunna believe there 's owt in th' 'ouse but a bottle of stout.

CLARA (*putting her hand on her stomach*)

It feels as if th' kettle 's going to boil over.

[*She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth, throws back her head, and snorts with laughter, hav-*

ing now regained her confidence. Laura laughs in the last state of exhaustion, her hand on her breast.

HOLROYD

Shall ta ha'e it then?

CLARA

What do you say, Laura — are you having a drop?

LAURA (*submissively, and naturally tongue-tied*)

Well — I don't mind — I will if *you* do.

CLARA (*recklessly*)

I think we 'll 'ave a drop, Charlie, an' risk it. It 'll 'appen hold the rest down.

[*There is a moment of silence, while Holroyd goes into the scullery. Clara surveys the room and the dramatic pose of Mrs. Holroyd curiously.*

HOLROYD (*suddenly*)

Heh! What, come 'ere —!

[*There is a smash of pots, and a rat careers out of the scullery. Laura, the first to see it, utters a scream, but is fastened to her chair, unable to move.*

CLARA (*jumps up to the table, crying*)

It 's a rat — Oh, save us! (*She scrambles up, banging her head on the lamp, which swings violently*)

MRS. HOLROYD (*who, with a little shriek, jerks her legs up on to the sofa, where she was stiffly reclining, now cries in despairing falsetto, stretching forth her arms*) The lamp — mind, the lamp!

[*Clara steadies the lamp, and holds her hand to her head.*

HOLROYD (*coming from the scullery, a bottle of stout in his hand*) Where is he?

CLARA

I believe he 's gone under the sofa. My, an' he 's

a thumper, if you like, as big as a rabbit.

[*Holroyd advances cautiously toward the sofa.*

LAURA (*springing suddenly into life*)

Hi, hi, let me go — let me go — Don't touch him — Where is he? (*She flees and scrambles onto Clara's armchair, catching hold of the latter's skirts*)

CLARA

Hang off — do you want to have a body down — Mind, I tell you.

MRS. HOLROYD (*bunched up on the sofa, with crossed hands holding her arms, fascinated, watches her husband as he approaches to stoop and attack the rat; she suddenly screams*) Don't, he 'll fly at you!

HOLROYD

He 'll not get a chance.

MRS. HOLROYD

He will, he will — and they 're poisonous! (*She ends on a very high note. Leaning forward on the sofa as far as she dares, she stretches out her arms to keep back her husband, who is about to kneel and search under the sofa for the rat*)

HOLROYD

Come off, I canna see him.

MRS. HOLROYD

I won't let you; he 'll fly at you.

HOLROYD

I 'll settle him —

MRS. HOLROYD

Open the door and let him go.

HOLROYD

I shonna. I 'll settle him. Shut thy claver. He 'll non come anigh thee.

[*He kneels down and begins to creep to the sofa. With a great bound, Mrs. Holroyd flies to the door and flings it open. Then she rushes back to the couch.*

CLARA

There he goes!

HOLROYD (*simultaneously*)

Hi!— Ussza! (*He flings the bottle of stout out of the door*)

LAURA (*piteously*)

Shut the door, do.

[*Holroyd rises, dusting his trousers' knees, and closes the door. Laura heavily descends and drops in the chair.*

CLARA

Here, come an' help us down, Charlie. Look at her; she 's going off. (*Though Laura is still purple red, she sinks back in the chair. Holroyd goes to the table. Clara places her hands on his shoulders and jumps lightly down. Then she pushes Holroyd with her elbow*) Look sharp, get a glass of water.

[*She unfastens Laura's collar and pulls off the paper bonnet. Mrs. Holroyd sits up, straightens her clothing, and tries to look cold and contemptuous. Holroyd brings a cup of water. Clara sprinkles her friend's face. Laura sighs and sighs again very deeply, then draws herself up painfully.*

CLARA (*tenderly*)

Do you feel any better — shall you have a drink of water? (*Laura mournfully shakes her head; Clara turns sharply to Holroyd*) She 'll 'ave a drop o' something. (*Holroyd goes out. Clara meanwhile*

fans her friend with a handkerchief. Holroyd brings stout. She pours out the stout, smells the glass, smells the bottle — then finally the cork) Eh, mester, it 's all of a work — it 's had a foisty cork.

[*At that instant the stairfoot door opens slowly, revealing the children — the girl peering over the boy's shoulder — both in white nightgowns. Everybody starts. Laura gives a little cry, presses her hand on her bosom, and sinks back, gasping.*

CLARA (*appealing and anxious, to Mrs. Holroyd*)

You don't 'appen to 'ave a drop of brandy for her, do you, missis?

[*Mrs. Holroyd rises coldly without replying, and goes to the stairfoot door where the children stand.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*sternly, to the children*)

Go to bed!

JACK

What 's a matter, mother?

MRS. HOLROYD

Never you mind, go to bed!

CLARA (*appealingly*)

Be quick, missis.

[*Mrs. Holroyd, glancing round, sees Laura going purple, and runs past the children upstairs. The boy and girl sit on the lowest stair. Their father goes out of the house, shamefaced. Mrs. Holroyd runs downstairs with a little brandy in a large bottle.*

CLARA

Thanks, awfully. (*To Laura*) Come on, try an' drink a drop, there 's a dear.

[*They administer brandy to Laura. The children sit watching, open-eyed. The girl stands up to look.*

MINNIE (*whispering*)
I believe it 's blue bonnet.

JACK (*whispering*)
It is n't — she 's in a fit.

MINNIE (*whispering*)
Well, look under th' table — (*Jack peers under*) — there 's 'er bonnet. (*Jack creeps forward*) Come back, our Jack.

JACK (*returns with the bonnet*)
It 's all made of paper.

MINNIE
Let 's have a look — it 's stuck together, not sewed.
[*She tries it on. Holroyd enters — he looks at the child.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*sharply, glancing round*)
Take that off!
[*Minnie hurriedly takes the bonnet from her head. Her father snatches it from her and puts it on the fire.*

CLARA
There, you 're coming round now, love.
[*Mrs. Holroyd turns away. She sees Holroyd's eyes on the brandy-bottle, and immediately removes it, corking it up.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*to Clara*)
You will not need this any more?

CLARA
No, thanks. I 'm very much obliged.

MRS. HOLROYD (*does not unbend, but speaks coldly to the children*) Come, this is no place for you — come back to bed.

MINNIE
No, mam, I don't want to.

MRS. HOLROYD (*contralto*)
Come along!

MINNIE
I 'm frightened, mam.

MRS. HOLROYD
Frightened, what of?

MINNIE
Oo, there *was* a row.

MRS. HOLROYD (*taking Minnie in her arms*)
Did they frighten you, my pet? (*She kisses her*)

JACK (*in a high whisper*)
Mother, it 's pink bonnet and blue bonnet, what was dancing.

MINNIE (*whimpering*)
I don't want to go to bed, mam, I 'm frightened.

CLARA (*who has pulled off her pink bonnet and revealed a jug-handle coiffure*) We 're going now, duckie — you 're not frightened of us, are you?
[*Mrs. Holroyd takes the girl away before she can answer. Jack lingers behind.*

HOLROYD
Now then, get off after your mother.

JACK (*taking no notice of his father*)
I say, what 's a dog's-nose?
[*Clara ups with her handkerchief and Laura responds with a faint giggle.*

HOLROYD
Go thy ways upstairs.

CLARA
It 's only a small whiskey with a spoonful of beer in it, my duck.

JACK
Oh!

CLARA

Come here, my duck, come on.

[*Jack, curious, advances.*

CLARA

You 'll tell your mother we did n't mean no harm, won't you?

JACK (*touching her earrings*)

What are they made of?

CLARA

They 're only earrings. Don't you like them?

JACK

Um! (*He stands surveying her curiously. Then he touches a bracelet made of many little mosaic brooches*) This is pretty, is n't it?

CLARA (*pleased*)

Do you like it?

[*She takes it off. Suddenly Mrs. Holroyd is heard calling, "Jack, Jack!" Clara starts.*

HOLROYD

Now then, get off!

CLARA (*as Jack is reluctantly going*)

Kiss me good-night, duckie, an' give this to your sister, shall you?

[*She hands Jack the mosaic bracelet. He takes it doubtfully. She kisses him. Holroyd watches in silence.*

LAURA (*suddenly, pathetically*)

Are n't you going to give me a kiss, an' all?

[*Jack yields her his cheek, then goes.*

CLARA (*to Holroyd*)

Are n't they nice children?

HOLROYD

Ay.

CLARA (*briskly*)

Oh, dear, you 're very short, all of a sudden. Don't answer if it hurts you.

LAURA

My, is n't he different?

HOLROYD (*laughing forcedly*)

I 'm no different.

CLARA

Yes, you are. You should n't 'ave brought us if you was going to turn funny over it.

HOLROYD

I 'm not funny.

CLARA

No, you 're not. (*She begins to laugh. Laura joins in in spite of herself*) You 're about as solemn as a roast potato. (*She flings up her hands, claps them down on her knees, and sways up and down as she laughs, Laura joining in, hand on breast*) Are you ready to be mashed? (*She goes off again — then suddenly wipes the laughter off her mouth and is solemn*) But look 'ere, this 'll never do. Now I 'm going to be quiet. (*She prims herself*)

HOLROYD

Tha 'd 'appen better.

CLARA

Oh, indeed! You think I 've got to pull a mug to look decent? You 'd have to pull a big un, at that rate.

[*She bubbles off, uncontrollably — shaking herself in exasperation meanwhile. Laura joins in. Holroyd leans over close to her.*

HOLROYD

Tha 's got plenty o' fizz in thee, seemly.

CLARA (*putting her hand on his face and pushing it aside, but leaving her hand over his cheek and mouth like a caress*) Don't, you 've been drinking. (*She begins to laugh*)

HOLROYD

Should we be goin' then?

CLARA

Where do you want to take us?

HOLROYD

Oh — you please yourself o' that! Come on wi' me.

CLARA (*sitting up prim*)

Oh, indeed!

HOLROYD (*catching hold of her*)

Come on, let 's be movin'— (*he glances apprehensively at the stairs*)

CLARA

What 's your hurry?

HOLROYD (*persuasively*)

Yi, come on wi' thee.

CLARA

I don't think. (*She goes off, uncontrollably*)

HOLROYD (*sitting on the table, just above her*)

What 's use o' sittin' 'ere?

CLARA

I 'm very comfy: I thank thee.

HOLROYD

Tha 'rt a baffling little 'ussy.

CLARA (*running her hand along his thigh*)

Are n't you havin' nothing, my dear? (*Offers him her glass*)

HOLROYD (*getting down from the table and putting his hand forcibly on her shoulder*) No. Come on, let 's shift.

CLARA (*struggling*)

Hands off!

[*She fetches him a sharp slap across the face. Mrs. Holroyd is heard coming downstairs. Clara, released, sits down, smoothing herself. Holroyd looks evil. He goes out to the door.*

CLARA (*to Mrs. Holroyd, penitently*)

I don't know what you think of us, I 'm sure.

MRS. HOLROYD

I think nothing at all.

CLARA (*bubbling*)

So you fix your thoughts elsewhere, do you? (*Suddenly changing to seriousness*) No, but I *have* been awful to-night.

MRS. HOLROYD (*contralto, emphatic*)

I don't want to know anything about you. I shall be glad when you 'll go.

CLARA

Turning-out time, Laura.

LAURA (*turtling*)

I 'm sorry, I 'm sure.

CLARA

Never mind. But as true as I 'm here, missis, I should never ha' come if I 'd thought. But I had a drop — it all started with your husband sayin' he was n't a married man.

LAURA (*laughing and wiping her eyes*)

I 've never knowed her to go off like it — it 's after the time she 's had.

CLARA

You know, my husband was a brute to me — an' I was in bed three month after he died. He was a

brute, he was. This is the first time I 've been out; it 's a'most the first laugh I 've had for a year.

LAURA

It 's true, what she says. We thought she 'd go out of 'er mind. She never spoke a word for a fortnight.

CLARA

Though he 's only been dead for two months, he was a brute to me. I was as nice a young girl as you could wish when I married him and went to the Fleece Inn — I was.

LAURA

Killed hisself drinking. An' she 's that excitable, she is. We s'll 'ave an awful time with 'er to-morrow, I know.

MRS. HOLROYD (*coldly*)

I don't know why I should hear all this.

CLARA

I know I must 'ave seemed awful. An' them children — are n't they nice little things, Laura?

LAURA

They are that.

HOLROYD (*entering from the door*)

Hanna you about done theer?

CLARA

My word, if this is the way you treat a lady when she comes to see you. (*She rises*)

HOLROYD

I 'll see you down th' line.

CLARA

You 're not coming a stride with us.

LAURA

We 've got no hat, neither of us.

CLARA

We 've got our own hair on our heads, at any rate. (*Drawing herself up suddenly in front of Mrs. Holroyd*) An' I 've been educated at a boarding school as good as anybody. I can behave myself either in the drawing-room or in the kitchen as is fitting and proper. But if you 'd buried a husband like mine, you would n't feel you 'd much left to be proud of — an' you might go off occasionally.

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't want to hear you.

CLARA (*bobbing a curtsy*)

Sorry I spoke.

[*She goes out stiffly, followed by Laura.*

HOLROYD (*going forward*)

You mun mind th' points down th' line.

CLARA'S VOICE

I thank thee, Charlie — mind thy own points.

[*He hesitates at the door — returns and sits down. There is silence in the room. Holroyd sits with his chin in his hand. Mrs. Holroyd listens. The footsteps and voices of the two women die out. Then she closes the door. Holroyd begins to unlace his boots.*

HOLROYD (*ashamed yet defiant, withal anxious to apologize*) Wheer 's my slippers?

[*Mrs. Holroyd sits on the sofa with face averted and does not answer.*

HOLROYD

Dost hear? (*He pulls off his boots, noisily, and begins to hunt under the sofa*) I canna find the things. (*No answer*) Humph! — then I 'll do be 'out 'em. (*He stumps about in his stocking feet; going into the scullery, he brings out the loaf of bread; he*

returns into the scullery) Wheer 's th' cheese? (*No answer — suddenly*) God blast it! (*He hobbles into the kitchen*) I 've trod on that brokken basin, an' cut my foot open. (*Mrs. Holroyd refuses to take any notice. He sits down and looks at his sole — pulls off his stocking and looks again*) It 's lamed me for life. (*Mrs. Holroyd glances at the wound*) Are 'na ter goin' ter get me öwt for it?

MRS. HOLROYD

Psh!

HOLROYD

Oh, a' right then. (*He hops to the dresser, opens a drawer, and pulls out a white rag; he is about to tear it*)

MRS. HOLROYD (*snatching it from him*)

Don't tear that!

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

Then what the deuce am I to do? (*Mrs. Holroyd sits stonily*) Oh, a' right then! (*He hops back to his chair, sits down, and begins to pull on his stocking*) A' right then — a' right then. (*In a fever of rage he begins pulling on his boots*) I 'll go where I *can* find a bit o' rag.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, that 's what you want! All you want is an excuse to be off again — " a bit of rag "!

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

An' what man 'd want to stop in wi' a woman sittin' as fow as a jackass, an' canna get a word from 'er edgeways.

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't expect me to speak to you after to-night's

show. How dare you bring them to my house, how dare you?

HOLROYD

They 've non hurt your house, have they?

MRS. HOLROYD

I wonder you dare to cross the doorstep.

HOLROYD

I s'll do what the deuce I like. They 're as good as you are.

MRS. HOLROYD (*stands speechless, staring at him; then low*) Don't you come near me again —

HOLROYD (*suddenly shouting, to get his courage up*) She 's as good as you are, every bit of it.

MRS. HOLROYD (*blazing*)

Whatever I was and whatever I may be, don't you ever come near me again.

HOLROYD

What! I 'll show thee. What 's the hurt to you if a woman comes to the house? They 're women as good as yourself, every whit of it.

MRS. HOLROYD

Say no more. *Go* with them then, and don't come back.

HOLROYD

What! Yi, I will go, an' you s'll see. What! You think you 're something, since your uncle left you that money, an' Blackymore puttin' you up to it. I can see your little game. I 'm not as daft as you imagine. I 'm no fool, I tell you.

MRS. HOLROYD

No, you 're not. You 're a drunken beast, that 's all you are.

HOLROYD

What, what — I 'm what? I 'll show you who 's gaffer, though. (*He threatens her*)

MRS. HOLROYD (*between her teeth*)

No, it 's not going on. If *you* won't go, I will.

HOLROYD

Go then, for you 've always been too big for your shoes, in my house —

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — I ought never to have looked at you. Only you showed a fair face then.

HOLROYD

What! What! We 'll see who 's master i' this house. I tell you, I 'm goin' to put a stop to it. (*He brings his fist down on the table with a bang*) It 's going to stop. (*He bangs the table again*) I 've put up with it long enough. Do you think I 'm a dog in the house, an' not a man, do you —

MRS. HOLROYD

A dog would be better.

HOLROYD

Oh! Oh! Then we 'll see. We 'll see who 's the dog and who isna. We 're goin' to see. (*He bangs the table*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Stop thumping that table! You 've wakened those children once, you and your trollops.

HOLROYD

I shall do what the deuce I like!

MRS. HOLROYD

No more, you won't, no more. I 've stood this long enough. Now I 'm going. As for you — you 've

got a red face where she slapped you. Now go to her.

HOLROYD

What? What?

MRS. HOLROYD

For I 'm sick of the sights and sounds of you.

HOLROYD (*bitterly*)

By God, an' I 've known it a long time.

MRS. HOLROYD

You have, and it 's true.

HOLROYD

An' I know who it is th 'rt hankerin' after.

MRS. HOLROYD

I only want to be rid of you.

HOLROYD

I know it mighty well. But *I* know him!

[*Mrs. Holroyd, sinking down on the sofa, suddenly begins to sob half-hysterically. Holroyd watches her. As suddenly, she dries her eyes.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Do you think I care about what you say? (*Suddenly*) Oh, I 've had enough. I 've tried, I 've tried for years, for the children's sakes. Now I 've had enough of your shame and disgrace.

HOLROYD

Oh, indeed!

MRS. HOLROYD (*her voice is dull and inflexible*)

I 've had enough. Go out again after those trollops — leave me alone. I 've had enough. (*Holroyd stands looking at her*) Go, I mean it, go out again. And if you never come back again, I 'm glad. I 've had enough. (*She keeps her face averted, will not*

look at him, her attitude expressing thorough weariness)

HOLROYD

All right then!

[*He hobbles, in unlaced boots, to the door. Then he turns to look at her. She turns herself still farther away, so that her back is toward him. He goes.*

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is the same, two hours later. The cottage is in darkness, save for the firelight. On the table is spread a newspaper. A cup and saucer, a plate, a piece of bacon in the frying tin are on the newspaper ready for the miner's breakfast. Mrs. Holroyd has gone to bed. There is a noise of heavy stumbling down the three steps outside.

BLACKMORE'S VOICE

Steady, now, steady. It 's all in darkness. Missis! — Has she gone to bed?

[*He tries the latch — shakes the door.*

HOLROYD'S VOICE (*he is drunk*)

Her 's locked me out. Let me smash that bloody door in. Come out — come out — ussza! (*He strikes a heavy blow on the door. There is a scuffle*)

BLACKMORE'S VOICE

Hold on a bit — what 're you doing?

HOLROYD'S VOICE

I 'm smashing that blasted door in.

MRS. HOLROYD (*appearing and suddenly drawing the bolts, flinging the door open*) What do you think you 're doing?

HOLROYD (*lurching into the room, snarling*)

What? What? Tha thought tha 'd play thy monkey tricks on me, did ter? (*Shouting*) But

I 'm going to show thee. (*He lurches at her threateningly; she recoils*)

BLACKMORE (*seizing him by the arm*)

Here, here, —! Come and sit down and be quiet.

HOLROYD (*snarling at him*)

What? — What? An' what's thäigh got ter do wi' it? (*Shouting*) What 's thäigh got ter do wi' it?

BLACKMORE

Nothing — nothing; but it 's getting late, and you want your supper.

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

I want nöwt. I'm allowed nöwt in this 'ouse. (*Shouting louder*) 'Er begrudges me ivry morsel I ha'e.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, what a story!

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

It 's the truth, an' you know it.

BLACKMORE (*conciliatory*)

You 'll rouse the children. You 'll rouse the children, at this hour.

HOLROYD (*suddenly quiet*)

Not me — not if I know it. *I* shan't disturb 'em — bless 'em.

[*He staggers to his armchair and sits heavily.*

BLACKMORE

Shall I light the lamp?

MRS. HOLROYD

No, don't trouble. Don't stay any longer, there 's no need.

BLACKMORE (*quietly*)

I 'll just see it 's all right.

[*He proceeds in silence to light the lamp. Holroyd is seen dropping forward in his chair. He has a cut*

on his cheek. Mrs. Holroyd is in an old-fashioned dressing-gown. Blackmore has an overcoat buttoned up to his chin. There is a very large lump of coal on the red fire.

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't stay any longer.

BLACKMORE

I 'll see it 's all right.

MRS. HOLROYD

I shall be all right. He 'll go to sleep now.

BLACKMORE

But he can't go like that.

MRS. HOLROYD

What has he done to his face?

BLACKMORE

He had a row with Jim Goodwin.

MRS. HOLROYD

What about?

BLACKMORE

I don't know.

MRS. HOLROYD

The beast!

BLACKMORE

By Jove, and is n't he a weight! He 's getting fat, must be —

MRS. HOLROYD

He 's big made — he has a big frame.

BLACKMORE

Whatever he is, it took me all my time to get him home. I thought I 'd better keep an eye on him. I knew you 'd be worrying. So I sat in the smoke-

room and waited for him. Though it 's a dirty hole — and dull as hell.

MRS. HOLROYD

Why did you bother?

BLACKMORE

Well, I thought you 'd be upset about him. I had to drink three whiskies — had to, in all conscience — (*smiling*)

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't want to be the ruin of you.

BLACKMORE (*smiling*)

Don't you? I thought he 'd pitch forward onto the lines and crack his skull.

[*Holroyd has been sinking farther and farther forward in drunken sleep. He suddenly jerks too far and is awakened. He sits upright, glaring fiercely and dazedly at the two, who instantly cease talking.*

HOLROYD (*to Blackmore*)

What are thäigh doin' 'ere?

BLACKMORE

Why, I came along with you.

HOLROYD

Thou 'rt a liar, I 'm only just come in.

MRS. HOLROYD (*coldly*)

He is no liar at all. He brought you home because you were too drunk to come yourself.

HOLROYD (*starting up*)

Thou 'rt a liar! I niver set eyes on him this night, afore now.

MRS. HOLROYD (*with a "Pf" of contempt*)

You don't know what you *have* done to-night.

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

I s'll not have it, I tell thee.

MRS. HOLROYD

Psh!

HOLROYD

I s'll not ha'e it. I s'll ha'e no carryin's on i' my 'ouse —

MRS. HOLROYD (*shrugging her shoulders*)

Talk when you 've got some sense.

HOLROYD (*fiercely*)

I 've as much sense as thäigh. Am I a fool? Canna I see? What 's *he* doin' here then, answer me that. What —?

MRS. HOLROYD

Mr. Blackmore came to bring *you* home, because you were *too drunk* to find your own way. And this is the thanks he gets.

HOLROYD (*contemptuously*)

Blackymore, Blackymore. It 's him tha cuts thy cloth by, is it?

MRS. HOLROYD (*hotly*)

You don't know what you 're talking about, so keep your tongue still.

HOLROYD (*bitingly*)

I don't know what I 'm talking about — I don't know what I 'm talking about — don't I? An' what about him standing there then, if I don't know what I 'm talking about? — What?

BLACKMORE

You 've been to sleep, Charlie, an' forgotten I came in with you, not long since.

HOLROYD

I 'm not daft, I 'm not a fool. I 've got eyes in my head, and sense. You need n't try to get over me. I know what you 're up to.

BLACKMORE (*flushing*)

It 's a bit off to talk to me like that, Charlie, I must say.

HOLROYD

I 'm not good enough for 'er. She wants Mr. Blackymore. He 's a gentleman, he is. Now we have it all; now we understand.

MRS. HOLROYD

I wish you understood enough to keep your tongue still.

HOLROYD

What? What? I 'm to keep my tongue still, am I? An' what about *Mr. Blackymore?*

MRS. HOLROYD (*fiercely*)

Stop your mouth, you — you vulgar, low-minded brute.

HOLROYD

Am I? Am I? An' what are you? What tricks are you up to, an' all? But that 's all right — that 's all right. (*Shouting*) That 's all right, if it 's *you.*

BLACKMORE

I think I 'd better go. You seem to enjoy — er — er — calumniating your wife.

HOLROYD (*mockingly*)

Calamniating — calamniating — I 'll give you calamniating, you mealy-mouthed jockey: I 'll give you calamniating.

BLACKMORE

I think you 've said about enough.

HOLROYD

'Ave I, 'ave I? Yer flimsy jack — 'ave I? (*In a sudden burst*) But I 've not done wi' thee yet.

BLACKMORE (*ironically*)

No, and you have n't.

HOLROYD (*shouting — pulling himself up from the armchair*) I 'll show thee — I 'll show thee.

[*Blackmore laughs.*

HOLROYD

Yes! — yes, my young monkey. It 's thäigh, is it?

BLACKMORE

Yes, it 's *me.*

HOLROYD (*shouting*)

An' I 'll ma'e thee wish it wor n't, I will. What —? What —? Tha 'd come slivin' round here, would ta? (*He lurches forward at Blackmore with clenched fist*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Drunken, drunken fool — oh, don't.

HOLROYD (*turning to her*)

What?

[*She puts up her hands before her face. Blackmore seizes the upraised arm and swings Holroyd round.*

BLACKMORE (*in a towering passion*)

Mind what tha 'rt doing!

HOLROYD (*turning fiercely on him — incoherent*)

Wha' — wha' —!

[*He aims a heavy blow. Blackmore evades it, so that he is struck on the side of the chest. Suddenly he shows his teeth. He raises his fists ready to strike Holroyd when the latter stands to advantage.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*rushing upon Blackmore*)

No, no! Oh, no!

[*She flies and opens the door, and goes out. Blackmore glances after her, then at Holroyd, who is pre-*

paring, like a bull, for another charge. The young man's face lights up.

HOLROYD

Wha' — wha'—!

[*As he advances, Blackmore quickly retreats out-of-doors. Holroyd plunges upon him. Blackmore slips behind the door-jamb, puts out his foot, and trips Holroyd with a crash upon the brick yard.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, what has he done to himself?

BLACKMORE (*thickly*)

Tumbled over himself.

[*Holroyd is seen struggling to rise, and is heard incoherently cursing.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Are n't you going to get him up?

BLACKMORE

What for?

MRS. HOLROYD

But what shall we do?

BLACKMORE

Let him go to hell.

[*Holroyd, who had subsided, begins to snarl and struggle again.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*in terror*)

He 's getting up.

BLACKMORE

All right, let him.

[*Mrs. Holroyd looks at Blackmore, suddenly afraid of him also.*

HOLROYD (*in a last frenzy*)

I 'll show thee — I 'll —

[*He raises himself up, and is just picking his balance*

when Blackmore, with a sudden light kick, sends him sprawling again. He is seen on the edge of the light to collapse into stupor.

MRS. HOLROYD

He 'll kill you, he 'll kill you!

[*Blackmore laughs short.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Would you believe it! Oh, is n't it awful! (*She begins to weep in a little hysteria; Blackmore stands with his back leaning on the doorway, grinning in a strained fashion*) Is he hurt, do you think?

BLACKMORE

I don't know — I should think not.

MRS. HOLROYD

I wish he was dead; I do, with all my heart.

BLACKMORE

Do you? (*He looks at her quickly; she wavers and shrinks; he begins to smile strainedly as before*) You don't know *what* you wish, or what you want.

MRS. HOLROYD (*troubled*)

Do you think I could get past him to come inside?

BLACKMORE

I should think so.

[*Mrs. Holroyd, silent and troubled, manœuvres in the doorway, stepping over her husband's feet, which lie on the threshold.*

BLACKMORE

Why, you 've got no shoes and stockings on!

MRS. HOLROYD

No. (*She enters the house and stands trembling before the fire*)

BLACKMORE (*following her*)

Are you cold?

MRS. HOLROYD

A little — with standing on the yard.

BLACKMORE

What a shame!

[*She, uncertain of herself, sits down. He drops on one knee, awkwardly, and takes her feet in his hands.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't — no, don't!

BLACKMORE

They are frightfully cold. (*He remains, with head sunk, for some moments, then slowly rises*) Damn him!

[*They look at each other; then, at the same time, turn away.*

MRS. HOLROYD

We can't leave him lying there.

BLACKMORE

No — no! I 'll bring him in.

MRS. HOLROYD

But —!

BLACKMORE

He won't wake again. The drink will have got hold of him by now. (*He hesitates*) Could you take hold of his feet — he 's so heavy.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

[*They go out and are seen stooping over Holroyd.*

BLACKMORE

Wait, wait, till I 've got him — half a minute.

[*Mrs. Holroyd backs in first. They carry Holroyd in and lay him on the sofa.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Does n't he look awful?

BLACKMORE

It 's more mark than mar. It is n't much, really.

[*He is busy taking off Holroyd's collar and tie, unfastening the waistcoat, the braces and the waist buttons of the trousers; he then proceeds to unlace the drunken man's boots.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*who has been watching closely*)

I shall never get him upstairs.

BLACKMORE

He can sleep here, with a rug or something to cover him. *You* don't want him — upstairs?

MRS. HOLROYD

Never again.

BLACKMORE (*after a moment or two of silence*)

He 'll be all right down here. Have you got a rug?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

[*She goes upstairs. Blackmore goes into the scullery, returning with a lading can and towel. He gets hot water from the boiler. Then, kneeling down, he begins to wipe the drunken man's face lightly with the flannel, to remove the blood and dirt.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*returning*)

What are you doing?

BLACKMORE

Only wiping his face to get the dirt out.

MRS. HOLROYD

I wonder if he 'd do as much for you.

BLACKMORE

I hope not.

MRS. HOLROYD

Is n't he horrible, horrible —

BLACKMORE (*looks up at her*)
Don't look at him then.

MRS. HOLROYD
I can't take it in, it 's too much.

BLACKMORE
He won't wake. I will stay with you.

MRS. HOLROYD (*earnestly*)
No — oh, no.

BLACKMORE
There will be the drawn sword between us. (*He indicates the figure of Holroyd, which lies, in effect, as a barrier between them*)

MRS. HOLROYD (*blushing*)
Don't!

BLACKMORE
I 'm sorry.

MRS. HOLROYD (*after watching him for a few moments lightly wiping the sleeping man's face with a towel*)
I wonder you can be so careful over him.

BLACKMORE (*quietly*)
It 's only because he 's helpless.

MRS. HOLROYD
But why should you love him ever so little?

BLACKMORE
I don't — only he 's helpless. Five minutes since I could have killed him.

MRS. HOLROYD
Well, I don't understand you men.

BLACKMORE
Why?

MRS. HOLROYD
I don't know.

BLACKMORE

I thought as I stood in that doorway, and he was trying to get up — I wished as hard as I 've ever wished anything in my life —

MRS. HOLROYD

What?

BLACKMORE

That I 'd killed him. I 've never wished anything so much in my life — if wishes were anything.

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't, it *does* sound awful.

BLACKMORE

I *could* have done it, too. He ought to be dead.

MRS. HOLROYD (*pleading*)

No, don't! You know you don't mean it, and you make me feel so awful.

BLACKMORE

I do mean it. It is simply true, what I say.

MRS. HOLROYD

But don't say it.

BLACKMORE

No?

MRS. HOLROYD

No, we 've had enough.

BLACKMORE

Give me the rug.

[*She hands it him, and he tucks Holroyd up.*

MRS. HOLROYD

You only do it to play on my feelings.

BLACKMORE (*laughing shortly*)

And now give me a pillow — thanks.

[*There is a pause — both look at the sleeping man.*

BLACKMORE

I suppose you 're fond of him, really.

MRS. HOLROYD

No more.

BLACKMORE

You *were* fond of him?

MRS. HOLROYD

I was — yes.

BLACKMORE

What did you like in him?

MRS. HOLROYD (*uneasily*)

I don't know.

BLACKMORE

I suppose you really care about him, even now.

MRS. HOLROYD

Why are you so sure of it?

BLACKMORE

Because I think it is so.

MRS. HOLROYD

I did care for him — now he has destroyed it —

BLACKMORE

I don't believe he can destroy it.

MRS. HOLROYD (*with a short laugh*)

Don't you? When you are married you try. You 'll find it is n't so hard.

BLACKMORE

But what did you like in him — because he was good-looking, and strong, and that?

MRS. HOLROYD

I liked that as well. But if a man makes a nuisance of himself, his good looks are ugly to you, and his strength loathsome. Do you think I *care* about a

man because he 's got big fists, when he is a coward in his real self?

BLACKMORE

Is he a coward?

MRS. HOLROYD

He *is* — a pettifogging, paltry one.

BLACKMORE

And so you 've really done with him?

MRS. HOLROYD

I have.

BLACKMORE

And what are you going to do?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know.

BLACKMORE

I suppose nothing. You 'll just go on — even if you 've done with him — you 'll go on with him.

[*There is a long pause.*

BLACKMORE

But was there nothing else in him but his muscles and his good looks to attract you to him?

MRS. HOLROYD

Why? What does it matter?

BLACKMORE

What did you *think* he was?

MRS. HOLROYD

Why must we talk about him?

BLACKMORE

Because I can never quite believe you.

MRS. HOLROYD

I can't help whether you believe it or not.

BLACKMORE

Are you just in a rage with him, because of to-night?

MRS. HOLROYD

I know, to-night finished it. But it was never right between us.

BLACKMORE

Never?

MRS. HOLROYD

Not once. And then to-night — no, it 's too much; I can't stand any more of it.

BLACKMORE

I suppose he got tipsy. Then he said he was n't a married man — vowed he was n't, to those paper bonnets. They found out he was, and said he was frightened of his wife getting to know. Then he said they should all go to supper at his house — I suppose they came out of mischief.

MRS. HOLROYD

He did it to insult me.

BLACKMORE

Oh, he was a bit tight — you can't say it was deliberate.

MRS. HOLROYD

No, but it shows how he feels toward me. The feeling comes out in drink.

BLACKMORE

How does he feel toward you?

MRS. HOLROYD

He wants to insult me, and humiliate me, in every moment of his life. Now I simply despise him.

BLACKMORE

You really don't care any more about him?

MRS. HOLROYD

No.

BLACKMORE (*hesitates*)

And you would leave him?

MRS. HOLROYD

I would leave him, and not care *that* about him any more. (*She snaps her fingers*)

BLACKMORE

Will you come with me?

MRS. HOLROYD (*after a reluctant pause*)

Where?

BLACKMORE

To Spain: I can any time have a job there, in a decent part. You could take the children.

[*The figure of the sleeper stirs uneasily — they watch him.*

BLACKMORE

Will you?

MRS. HOLROYD

When would you go?

BLACKMORE

To-morrow, if you like.

MRS. HOLROYD

But why do you want to saddle yourself with me and the children?

BLACKMORE

Because I want to.

MRS. HOLROYD

But you don't love me?

BLACKMORE

Why don't I?

MRS. HOLROYD

You don't.

BLACKMORE

I don't know about that. I don't know anything

about love. Only I 've gone on for a year now, and it 's got stronger and stronger —

MRS. HOLROYD

What has?

BLACKMORE

This — this wanting you, to live with me. I took no notice of it for a long time. Now I can't get away from it, at no hour and nohow. (*He still avoids direct contact with her*)

MRS. HOLROYD

But you 'd *like* to get away from it.

BLACKMORE

I hate a mess of any sort. But if you 'll come away with me — you and the children —

MRS. HOLROYD

But I could n't — you don't love me —

BLACKMORE

I don't know what you mean by I don't love you.

MRS. HOLROYD

I can feel it.

BLACKMORE

And do you love *me?* (*A pause*)

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know. Everything is so — so —

[*There is a long pause.*

BLACKMORE

How old are you?

MRS. HOLROYD

Thirty-two.

BLACKMORE

I 'm twenty-seven.

MRS. HOLROYD

And have you never been in love?

BLACKMORE

I don't think so. I don't know.

MRS. HOLROYD

But you must know. I must go and shut that door that keeps clicking.

[*She rises to go upstairs, making a clatter at the stairfoot door. The noise rouses her husband. As she goes upstairs, he moves, makes coughing sounds, turns over, and then suddenly sits upright, gazing at Blackmore. The latter sits perfectly still on the sofa, his head dropped, hiding his face. His hands are clasped. They remain thus for a minute.*

HOLROYD

Hello! (*He stares fixedly*) Hello! (*His tone is undecided, as if he mistrusts himself*) What are — who are ter? (*Blackmore does not move; Holroyd stares blankly; he then turns and looks at the room*) Well, I dunna know.

[*He staggers to his feet, clinging to the table, and goes groping to the stairs. They creak loudly under his weight. A doorlatch is heard to click. In a moment Mrs. Holroyd comes quickly downstairs.*

BLACKMORE

Has he gone to bed?

MRS. HOLROYD (*nodding*)

Lying on the bed.

BLACKMORE

Will he settle now?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know. He is like that sometimes. He will have delirium tremens if he goes on.

BLACKMORE (*softly*)

You can't stay with him, you know.

MRS. HOLROYD

And the children?

BLACKMORE

We 'll take them.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh!

[*Her face puckers to cry. Suddenly he starts up and puts his arms round her, holding her protectively and gently, very caressingly. She clings to him. They are silent for some moments.*

BLACKMORE (*struggling, in an altered voice*)

Look at me and kiss me.

[*Her sobs are heard distinctly. Blackmore lays his hand on her cheek, caressing her always with his hand.*

BLACKMORE

My God, but I hate him! I wish either he was dead or me. (*Mrs. Holroyd hides against him; her sobs cease; after a while he continues in the same murmuring fashion*) It can't go on like it any more. I feel as if I should come in two. I can't keep away from you. I simply can't. Come with me. Come with me and leave him. If you knew what a hell it is for me to have you here — and to see him. I can't go without you, I can't. It 's been hell every moment for six months now. You say I don't love you. Perhaps I don't, for all I know about it. But oh, my God, don't keep me like it any longer. Why should *he* have you — and I 've never had anything.

MRS. HOLROYD

Have you never loved anybody?

BLACKMORE

No — I 've tried. Kiss me of your own wish — will you?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know.

BLACKMORE (*after a pause*)

Let 's break clear. Let 's go right away. Do you care for me?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know. (*She loosens herself, rises dumbly*)

BLACKMORE

When do you think you *will* know?

[*She sits down helplessly.*

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know.

BLACKMORE

Yes, you do know, really. If he was dead, should you marry me?

MRS. HOLROYD

Don't say it —

BLACKMORE

Why not? If wishing of mine would kill him, he 'd soon be out of the way.

MRS. HOLROYD

But the children!

BLACKMORE

I 'm fond of them. I shall have good money.

MRS. HOLROYD

But he 's their father.

BLACKMORE

What does that mean —?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, I know — (*a pause*) but —

BLACKMORE

Is it *him* that keeps you?

MRS. HOLROYD

No.

BLACKMORE

Then come with me. Will you? (*He stands waiting for her; then he turns and takes his overcoat; pulls it on, leaving the collar turned up, ceasing to twist his cap*) Well — will you tell me to-morrow? [*She goes forward and flings her arms round his neck. He suddenly kisses her passionately.*

MRS. HOLROYD

But I ought not. (*She draws away a little; he will not let her go*)

BLACKMORE

Yes, it 's all right. (*He holds her close*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Is it?

BLACKMORE

Yes, it is. It 's all right.

[*He kisses her again. She releases herself but holds his hand. They keep listening.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Do you love me?

BLACKMORE

What do you ask for?

MRS. HOLROYD

Have I hurt you these months?

BLACKMORE

You have n't. And I don't care what it 's been if you 'll come with me. (*There is a noise upstairs and*

they wait) You *will* soon, won't you?

[*She kisses him.*

MRS. HOLROYD

He 's not safe. (*She disengages herself and sits on the sofa*)

BLACKMORE (*takes a place beside her, holding her hand in both his*) You should have waited for me.

MRS. HOLROYD

How wait?

BLACKMORE

And not have married him.

MRS. HOLROYD

I might never have known you — I married him to get out of my place.

BLACKMORE

Why?

MRS. HOLROYD

I was left an orphan when I was six. My Uncle John brought me up, in the Coach and Horses at Rainsworth. He 'd got no children. He was good to me, but he drank. I went to Mansfield Grammar School. Then he fell out with me because I would n't wait in the bar, and I went as nursery governess to Berryman's. And I felt I 'd nowhere to go, I belonged to nowhere, and nobody cared about me, and men came after me, and I hated it. So to get out of it, I married the first man that turned up.

BLACKMORE

And you never cared about him?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, I did. I did care about him. I wanted to be a wife to him. But there 's nothing at the bottom of him, if you know what I mean. You can't *get* any-

where with him. There 's just his body and nothing else. Nothing that keeps him, no anchor, no roots, nothing satisfying. It 's a horrible feeling there is about him, that nothing is safe or permanent — nothing is anything —

BLACKMORE

And do you think you can trust *me?*

MRS. HOLROYD

I think you 're different from him.

BLACKMORE

Perhaps I 'm not.

MRS. HOLROYD (*warmly*)

You are.

BLACKMORE

At any rate, we 'll see. You 'll come on Saturday to London?

MRS. HOLROYD

Well, you see, there 's my money. I have n't got it yet. My uncle has left me about a hundred and twenty pounds.

BLACKMORE

Well, see the lawyer about it as soon as you can. I can let you have some money if you want any. But don't let us wait after Saturday.

MRS. HOLROYD

But is n't it wrong?

BLACKMORE

Why, if you don't care for him, and the children are miserable between the two of you — which they are—

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

BLACKMORE

Well, then I see no wrong. As for him — he would

go one way, and only one way, whatever you do. Damn him, he does n't matter.

MRS. HOLROYD

No.

BLACKMORE

Well, then — have done with it. Can't you cut clean of him? Can't you now?

MRS. HOLROYD

And then — the children —

BLACKMORE

They 'll be all right with me and you — won't they?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes —

BLACKMORE

Well, then. Now, come and have done with it. We can't keep on being ripped in two like this. We need never hear of him any more.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — I love you. I do love you —

BLACKMORE

Oh, my God! (*He speaks with difficulty — embracing her*)

MRS. HOLROYD

When I look at him, and then at you — ha — (*she gives a short laugh*)

BLACKMORE

He 's had all the chance — it 's only fair — Lizzie —

MRS. HOLROYD

My love.

[*There is silence. He keeps his arm round her. After hesitating, he picks up his cap.*

BLACKMORE

I 'll go then — at any rate. Shall you come with me?

[*She follows him to the door.*

MRS. HOLROYD

I 'll come on Saturday.

BLACKMORE

Not now?

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

Scene, the same. Time, the following evening, about seven o'clock. The table is half laid, with a large cup and saucer, plate, etc., ready for Holroyd's dinner, which, like all miners, he has when he comes home between four and five o'clock. On the other half of the table Mrs. Holroyd is ironing. On the hearth stands newly baked loaves of bread. The irons hang at the fire.

Jack, with a bowler hat hanging at the back of his head, parades up to the sofa, on which stands Minnie engaged in dusting a picture. She has a soiled white apron tied behind her, to make a long skirt.

JACK

Good mornin', missis. Any scissors or knives to grind?

MINNIE (*peering down from the sofa*)

Oh, I can't be bothered to come downstairs. Call another day.

JACK

I shan't.

MINNIE (*keeping up her part*)

Well, I can't come down now. (*Jack stands irresolute*) Go on, you have to go and steal the baby.

JACK

I 'm not.

MINNIE

Well, you can steal the eggs out of the fowl-house.

JACK

I 'm not.

MINNIE

Then I shan't play with you. (*Jack takes off his bowler hat and flings it on the sofa; tears come in Minnie's eyes*) Now I 'm *not* friends. (*She surveys him ruefully; after a few moments of silence she clambers down and goes to her mother*) Mam, he won't play with me.

MRS. HOLROYD (*crossly*)

Why don't you play with her? If you begin bothering, you must go to bed.

JACK

Well, I don't want to play.

MRS. HOLROYD

Then you must go to bed.

JACK

I don't want to.

MRS. HOLROYD

Then what do you want, I should like to know?

MINNIE

I wish my father 'd come.

JACK

I do.

MRS. HOLROYD

I suppose he thinks he 's paying me out. This is the third time this week he 's slunk past the door and gone down to Old Brinsley instead of coming in to his dinner. He 'll be as drunk as a lord when he does come.

[*The children look at her plaintively.*

MINNIE

Is n't he a nuisance?

JACK

I hate him. I wish he 'd drop down th' pit-shaft.

MRS. HOLROYD

Jack! — I never heard such a thing in my life! You must n't say such things — it 's wicked.

JACK

Well, I do.

MRS. HOLROYD (*loudly*)

I won't have it. He 's your father, remember.

JACK (*in a high voice*)

Well, he 's always comin' home an' shoutin' an' bangin' on the table. (*He is getting tearful and defiant*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Well, you must n't take any notice of him.

MINNIE (*wistfully*)

'Appen if you said something nice to him, mother, he 'd happen go to bed, and not shout.

JACK

I 'd hit him in the mouth.

MRS. HOLROYD

Perhaps we 'll go to another country, away from him — should we?

JACK

In a ship, mother?

MINNIE

In a ship, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, in a big ship, where it 's blue sky, and water and palm-trees, and —

MINNIE

An' dates —?

JACK

When should we go?

MRS. HOLROYD

Some day.

MINNIE

But who 'd work for us? Who should we have for father?

JACK

You don't want a father. I can go to work for us.

MRS. HOLROYD

I 've got a lot of money now, that your uncle left me.

MINNIE (*after a general thoughtful silence*)

An' would my father stop here?

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, he 'd be all right.

MINNIE

But who would he live with?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know — one of his paper bonnets, if he likes.

MINNIE

Then she could have her old bracelet back, could n't she?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — there it is on the candlestick, waiting for her.

[*There is a sound of footsteps — then a knock at the door. The children start.*

MINNIE (*in relief*)

Here he is.

[*Mrs. Holroyd goes to the door. Blackmore enters.*

BLACKMORE

It is foggy to-night — Hello, aren't you youngsters gone to bed?

MINNIE

No, my father 's not come home yet.

BLACKMORE (*turning to Mrs. Holroyd*)

Did he go to work then, after last night?

MRS. HOLROYD

I suppose so. His pit things were gone when I got up. I never thought he 'd go.

BLACKMORE

And he took his snap as usual?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, just as usual. I suppose he 's gone to the New Inn. He 'd say to himself he 'd pay me out. That 's what he always does say, " I 'll pay thee out for that bit — I 'll ma'e thee regret it."

JACK

We 're going to leave him.

BLACKMORE

So you think he 's at the New Inn?

MRS. HOLROYD

I 'm sure he is — and he 'll come when he 's full. He 'll have a bout now, you 'll see.

MINNIE

Go and fetch him, Mr. Blackmore.

JACK

My mother says we shall go in a ship and leave him.

BLACKMORE (*after looking keenly at Jack: to Mrs. Holroyd*) Shall I go and see if he 's at the New Inn?

MRS. HOLROYD

No — perhaps you 'd better not —

BLACKMORE

Oh, he shan't see me. I can easily manage that.

JACK

Fetch him, Mr. Blackmore.

BLACKMORE

All right, Jack. (*To Mrs. Holroyd*) Shall I?

MRS. HOLROYD

We 're always pulling on you — But yes, do!

[*Blackmore goes out.*

JACK

I wonder how long he 'll be.

MRS. HOLROYD

You come and go to bed now: you 'd better be out of the way when he comes in.

MINNIE

And you won't say anything to him, mother, will you?

MRS. HOLROYD

What do you mean?

MINNIE

You won't begin of him — row him.

MRS. HOLROYD

Is he to have all his own way? What *would* he be like, if I did n't row him?

JACK

But it does n't matter, mother, if we 're going to leave him —

MINNIE

But Mr. Blackmore 'll come back, won't he, mam, and dad won't shout before him?

MRS. HOLROYD (*beginning to undress the children*)

Yes, he 'll come back.

MINNIE

Mam — could I have that bracelet to go to bed with?

MRS. HOLROYD

Come and say your prayers.

[*They kneel, muttering in their mother's apron.*

MINNIE (*suddenly lifting her head*)

Can I, mam?

MRS. HOLROYD (*trying to be stern*)

Have you finished your prayers?

MINNIE

Yes.

MRS. HOLROYD

If you want it — beastly thing! (*She reaches the bracelet down from the mantelpiece*) Your father must have put it up there — I don't know where I left it. I suppose he 'd think I was proud of it and wanted it for an ornament.

[*Minnie gloats over it. Mrs. Holroyd lights a candle and they go upstairs. After a few moments the outer door opens, and there enters an old woman. She is of middling stature and wears a large gray shawl over her head. After glancing sharply round the room, she advances to the fire, warms herself, then, taking off her shawl, sits in the rocking-chair. As she hears Mrs. Holroyd's footsteps, she folds her hands and puts on a lachrymose expression, turning down the corners of her mouth and arching her eyebrows.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Hello, mother, is it you?

GRANDMOTHER

Yes, it 's me. Have n't you finished ironing?

MRS. HOLROYD

Not yet.

GRANDMOTHER

You 'll have your irons red-hot.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, I s'll have to stand them to cool. (*She does so, and moves about at her ironing*)

GRANDMOTHER

And you don't know what 's become of Charles?

MRS. HOLROYD

Well, he 's not come home from work yet. I supposed he was at the New Inn — Why?

GRANDMOTHER

That young electrician come knocking asking if I knew where he was. "Eh," I said, "I 've not set eyes on him for over a week — nor his wife neither, though they pass th' garden gate every time they go out. I know nowt on 'im." I axed him what was the matter, so he said Mrs. Holroyd was anxious because he 'd not come home, so I thought I 'd better come and see. Is there anything up?

MRS. HOLROYD

No more than I 've told you.

GRANDMOTHER

It 's a rum 'un, if he 's neither in the New Inn nor the Prince o' Wales. I suppose something you 've done 's set him off.

MRS. HOLROYD

It 's nothing I 've done.

GRANDMOTHER

Eh, if he 's gone off and left you, whativer shall we do! Whativer 'ave you been doing?

MRS. HOLROYD

He brought a couple of bright daisies here last night

— two of those trollops from Nottingham — and I said I 'd not have it.

GRANDMOTHER (*sighing deeply*)

Ay, you 've never been able to agree.

MRS. HOLROYD

We agreed well enough except when he drank like a fish and came home rolling.

GRANDMOTHER (*whining*)

Well, what can you expect of a man as 'as been shut up i' th' pit all day? He must have a bit of relaxation.

MRS. HOLROYD

He can have it different from that, then. At any rate, I 'm sick of it.

GRANDMOTHER

Ay, you 've a stiff neck, but it 'll be bowed by you 're my age.

MRS. HOLROYD

Will it? I 'd rather it were broke.

GRANDMOTHER

Well — there 's no telling what a jealous man will do. (*She shakes her head*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Nay, I think it 's my place to be jealous, when he brings a brazen hussy here and sits carryin' on with her.

GRANDMOTHER

He 'd no business to do that. But you know, Lizzie, he 's got something on *his* side.

MRS. HOLROYD

What, pray?

GRANDMOTHER

Well, I don't want to make any mischief, but you 're

my son's wife, an' it 's nothing but my duty to tell you. They 've been saying a long time now as that young electrician is here a bit too often.

MRS. HOLROYD

He does n't come for my asking.

GRANDMOTHER

No, I don't suppose he wants for asking. But Charlie 's not the man to put up with that sort o' work.

MRS. HOLROYD

Charlie put up with it! If he 's anything to say, why does n't he say it, without going to other folks . . . ?

GRANDMOTHER

Charlie 's never been near me with a word — nor 'as he said a word elsewhere to my knowledge. For all that, this is going to end with trouble.

MRS. HOLROYD

In this hole, every gossiping creature thinks she 's got the right to cackle about you — sickening! And a parcel of lies.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, Lizzie, I 've never said anything against you. Charlie 's been a handful of trouble. He made my heart ache once or twice afore you had him, and he 's made it ache many, many 's the time since. But it 's not all on his side, you know.

MRS. HOLROYD (*hotly*)

No, I don't know.

GRANDMOTHER

You thought yourself above him, Lizzie, an' you know he 's not the man to stand it.

MRS. HOLROYD

No, he 's run away from it.

GRANDMOTHER (*venomously*)

And what man would n't leave a woman that allowed him to live on sufferance in the house with her, when he was bringing the money home?

MRS. HOLROYD

" Sufferance ! " — Yes, there 's been a lot of letting him live on " sufferance " in the house with me. It is *I* who have lived on sufferance, for his service and pleasure. No, what he wanted was the drink and the public house company, and because he could n't get them here, he went out for them. That 's all.

GRANDMOTHER

You have always been very clever at hitting things off, Lizzie. I was always sorry my youngest son married a clever woman. He only wanted a bit of coaxing and managing, and you clever women won't do it.

MRS. HOLROYD

He wanted a slave, not a wife.

GRANDMOTHER

It 's a pity your stomach was n't too high for him, before you had him. But no, you could have eaten him ravishing at one time.

MRS. HOLROYD

It 's a pity you did n't tell me what he was before I had him. But no, he was all angel. You left me to find out what he really was.

GRANDMOTHER

Some women could have lived with him happy enough. An' a fat lot you 'd have thanked me for my telling.

[*There is a knock at the door. Mrs. Holroyd opens.*

RIGLEY

They tell me, missus, as your mester 's not hoom yet.

MRS. HOLROYD

No — who is it?

GRANDMOTHER

Ask him to step inside. Don't stan' there lettin' the fog in.

[*Rigley steps in. He is a tall, bony, very roughly hewn collier.*

RIGLEY

Good evenin'.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, is it you, Mr. Rigley? (*In a querulous, spiteful tone to Mrs. Holroyd*) He butties along with Charlie.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh!

RIGLEY

An' han yer seen nowt on 'im?

MRS. HOLROYD

No — was he all right at work?

RIGLEY

Well, 'e wor nowt to mention. A bit short, like: 'adna much to say. I canna ma'e out what 'e 's done wi' 'issen. (*He is manifestly uneasy, does not look at the two women*)

GRANDMOTHER

An' did 'e come up i' th' same bantle wi' you?

RIGLEY

No — 'e didna. As Ah was comin' out o' th' stall, Ah shouted, " Art comin', Charlie? We 're a' off." An' 'e said, " Ah 'm comin' in a minute." 'E wor just finishin' a stint, like, an' 'e wanted ter get it set. An' 'e 'd been a bit roughish in 'is temper, like, so I thöwt 'e didna want ter walk to th' bottom wi' us. . . .

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*)

An' what 's 'e gone an' done to himself?

RIGLEY

Nay, missis, yo munna ax me that. 'E 's non done owt as Ah know on. On'y I wor thinkin', 'appen summat 'ad 'appened to 'im, like, seein' as nob'dy had any knowings of 'im comin' up.

MRS. HOLROYD

What is the matter, Mr. Rigley? Tell us it out.

RIGLEY

I canna do that, missis. It seems as if 'e niver come up th' pit — as far as we can make out. 'Appen a bit o' stuff 's fell an' pinned 'im.

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*)

An' 'ave you left 'im lying down there in the pit, poor thing?

RIGLEY (*uneasily*)

I couldna say for certain where 'e is.

MRS. HOLROYD (*agitated*)

Oh, it 's very likely not very bad, mother! Don't let us run to meet trouble.

RIGLEY

We 'ave to 'ope for th' best, missis, all on us.

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*)

Eh, they 'll bring 'im 'ome, I know they will, smashed up an' broke! An' one of my sons they 've burned down pit till the flesh dropped off 'im, an' one was shot till 'is shoulder was all of a mosh, an' they brought 'em 'ome to me. An' now there 's this. . . .

MRS. HOLROYD (*shuddering*)

Oh, don't, mother. (*Appealingly to Rigley*) You don't know that he 's hurt?

RIGLEY (*shaking his head*)

I canna tell you.

MRS. HOLROYD (*in a high hysterical voice*)

Then what is it?

RIGLEY (*very uneasy*)

I canna tell you. But yon young electrician — Mr. Blackmore — 'e rung down to the night deputy, an' it seems as though there 's been a fall or summat. . . .

GRANDMOTHER

Eh, Lizzie, you parted from him in anger. You little knowed how you 'd meet him again.

RIGLEY (*making an effort*)

Well, I 'd 'appen best be goin' to see what 's betide. (*He goes out*)

GRANDMOTHER

I 'm sure I 've had my share of bad luck, I have. I 'm sure I 've brought up five lads in the pit, through accidents and troubles, and now there 's this. The Lord has treated me very hard, very hard. It 's a blessing, Lizzie, as you 've got a bit of money, else what would 'ave become of the children?

MRS. HOLROYD

Well, if he 's badly hurt, there 'll be the Union-pay, and sick-pay — we shall manage. And perhaps it 's *not* very much.

GRANDMOTHER

There 's no knowin' but what they 'll be carryin' him to die i' th' hospital.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, don't say so, mother — it won't be so bad, you 'll see.

GRANDMOTHER

How much money have you, Lizzie, comin'?

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't know — not much over a hundred pounds.

GRANDMOTHER (*shaking her head*)

An' what 's that, what 's that?

MRS. HOLROYD (*sharply*)

Hush!

GRANDMOTHER (*crying*)

Why, what?

[*Mrs. Holroyd opens the door. In the silence can be heard the pulsing of the fan engine, then the driving engine chuffs rapidly: there is a skirr of brakes on the rope as it descends.*

MRS. HOLROYD

That 's twice they 've sent the chair down — I wish we could see. . . . Hark!

GRANDMOTHER

What is it?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — it 's stopped at the gate. It 's the doctor's.

GRANDMOTHER (*coming to the door*)

What, Lizzie?

MRS. HOLROYD

The doctor's motor. (*She listens acutely*) Dare you stop here, mother, while I run up to the top an' see?

GRANDMOTHER

You 'd better not go, Lizzie, you 'd better not. A woman 's best away.

MRS. HOLROYD

It is unbearable to wait.

GRANDMOTHER

Come in an' shut the door — it 's a cold that gets in your bones. (*She goes in*)

MRS. HOLROYD

Perhaps while he 's in bed we shall have time to change him. It 's an ill wind brings no good. He 'll happen be a better man.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, you can but try. Many a woman 's thought the same.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, dear, I wish somebody would come. He 's never been hurt since we were married.

GRANDMOTHER

No, he 's never had a bad accident, all the years he 's been in the pit. He 's been luckier than most. But everybody has it, sooner or later.

MRS. HOLROYD (*shivering*)

It *is* a horrid night.

GRANDMOTHER (*querulous*)

Yes, come your ways in.

MRS. HOLROYD

Hark!

[*There is a quick sound of footsteps. Blackmore comes into the light of the doorway.*

BLACKMORE

They 're bringing him.

MRS. HOLROYD (*quickly putting her hand over her breast*) What is it?

BLACKMORE

You can't tell anything 's the matter with him — it 's not marked him at all.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, what a blessing! And is it much?

BLACKMORE

Well —

MRS. HOLROYD
What is it?

BLACKMORE
It 's the worst.

GRANDMOTHER
Who is it? — What does he say?

[*Mrs. Holroyd sinks on the nearest chair with a horrified expression. Blackmore pulls himself together and enters. He is very pale.*

BLACKMORE
I came to tell you they 're bringing him home.

GRANDMOTHER
And you said it was n't very bad, did you?

BLACKMORE
No — I said it was — as bad as it could be.

MRS. HOLROYD (*rising and crossing to her mother-in-law, flings her arms round her; in a high voice*) Oh, mother, what shall we do? What shall we do?

GRANDMOTHER
You don't mean to say he 's dead?

BLACKMORE
Yes.

GRANDMOTHER (*staring*)
God help us, and how was it?

BLACKMORE
Some stuff fell.

GRANDMOTHER (*rocking herself and her daughter-in-law — both weeping*) Oh, God have mercy on us! Oh, God have mercy on us! Some stuff fell on him. An' he 'd not even time to cry for mercy; oh, God spare him! Oh, what shall we do for comfort? To be taken straight out of his sins. Oh, Lizzie, to think he should be cut off in his wickedness! He 's been

a bad lad of late, he has, poor lamb. He 's gone very wrong of late years, poor dear lamb, very wrong. Oh, Lizzie, think what 's to become of him now! If only you 'd have tried to be different with him.

MRS. HOLROYD (*moaning*)

Don't, mother, don't. I can't bear it.

BLACKMORE (*cold and clear*)

Where will you have him laid? The men will be here in a moment.

MRS. HOLROYD (*starting up*)

They can carry him up to bed —

BLACKMORE

It 's no good taking him upstairs. You 'll have to wash him and lay him out.

MRS. HOLROYD (*startled*)

Well —

BLACKMORE

He 's in his pit-dirt.

GRANDMOTHER

He is, bless him. We 'd better have him down here, Lizzie, where we can handle him.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

[*She begins to put the tea things away, but drops the sugar out of the basin and the lumps fly broadcast.*

BLACKMORE

Never mind, I 'll pick those up. You put the children's clothes away.

[*Mrs. Holroyd stares witless around. The Grandmother sits rocking herself and weeping. Blackmore clears the table, putting the pots in the scullery.*

He folds the white tablecloth and pulls back the table. The door opens. Mrs. Holroyd utters a cry. Rigley enters.

RIGLEY

They 're bringing him now, missis.

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh!

RIGLEY (*simply*)

There must ha' been a fall directly after we left him.

MRS. HOLROYD (*frowning, horrified*)

No — no!

RIGLEY (*to Blackmore*)

It fell a' back of him, an' shut 'im in as you might shut a loaf i' th' oven. It never touched him.

MRS. HOLROYD (*staring distractedly*)

Well, then —

RIGLEY

You see, it come on 'im as close as a trap on a mouse, an' gen him no air, an' what wi' th' gas, it smothered him. An' it wouldna be so very long about it neither.

MRS. HOLROYD (*quiet with horror*)

Oh!

GRANDMOTHER

Eh, dear — dear. Eh, dear — dear.

RIGLEY (*looking hard at her*)

I wasna to know what 'ud happen.

GRANDMOTHER (*not heeding him, but weeping all the time*) But the Lord gave him time to repent. He 'd have a few minutes to repent. Ay, I hope he did, I hope he did, else what was to become of him. The Lord cut him off in his sins, but He gave him time to repent.

[*Rigley looks away at the wall. Blackmore has made a space in the middle of the floor.*

BLACKMORE

If you 'll take the rocking-chair off the end of the rug, Mrs. Holroyd, I can pull it back a bit from the fire, and we can lay him on that.

GRANDMOTHER (*petulantly*)

What 's the good of messing about — (*She moves*)

MRS. HOLROYD

It suffocated him?

RIGLEY (*shaking his head, briefly*)

Yes. 'Appen th' after-damp —

BLACKMORE

He 'd be dead in a few minutes.

MRS. HOLROYD

No — oh, think!

BLACKMORE

You must n't think.

RIGLEY (*suddenly*)

They commin'!

[*Mrs. Holroyd stands at bay. The Grandmother half rises. Rigley and Blackmore efface themselves as much as possible. A man backs into the room, bearing the feet of the dead man, which are shod in great pit boots. As the head bearer comes awkwardly past the table, the coat with which the body is covered slips off, revealing Holroyd in his pit-dirt, naked to the waist.*

MANAGER (*a little stout, white-bearded man*)

Mind now, mind. Ay, missis, what a job, indeed, it is! (*Sharply*) Where mun they put him?

MRS. HOLROYD (*turning her face aside from the corpse*)

Lay him on the rug.

MANAGER

Steady now, do it steady.

SECOND BEARER (*rising and pressing back his shoulders*) By Guy, but 'e 'ings heavy.

MANAGER

Yi, Joe, I 'll back my life o' that.

GRANDMOTHER

Eh, Mr. Chambers, what 's this affliction on my old age. You kept your sons out o' the pit, but all mine 's in. And to think of the trouble I 've had — to think o' the trouble that 's come out of Brinsley pit to me.

MANAGER

It has that, it 'as that, missis. You seem to have had more 'n your share; I 'll admit it, you have.

MRS. HOLROYD (*who has been staring at the men*)

It is too much!

[*Blackmore frowns; Rigley glowers at her.*

MANAGER

You never knowed such a thing in your life. Here 's a man, holin' a stint, just finishin' (*He puts himself as if in the holer's position, gesticulating freely*) An' a lot o' stuff falls behind him, clean as a whistle, shuts him up safe as a worm in a nut and niver touches him — niver knowed such a thing in your life.

MRS. HOLROYD

Ugh!

MANAGER

It niver hurt him — niver touched him.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, but — but how long would he *be* (*she makes a sweeping gesture; the Manager looks at her and will*

not help her out) — how long would it take — oh — to — to kill him?

MANAGER

Nay, I canna tell ye. 'E didna seem to ha' strived much to get out — did he, Joe?

SECOND BEARER

No, not as far as Ah 'n seen.

FIRST BEARER

You look at 'is 'ands, you 'll see then. 'E 'd non ha'e room to swing the pick.

[*The Manager goes on his knees.*

MRS. HOLROYD (*shuddering*)

Oh, don't!

MANAGER

Ay, th' nails is broken a bit —

MRS. HOLROYD (*clenching her fists*)

Don't!

MANAGER

'E 'd be sure ter ma'e a bit of a fight. But th' gas 'ud soon get hold on 'im. Ay, it 's an awful thing to think of, it is indeed.

MRS. HOLROYD (*her voice breaking*)

I can't bear it!

MANAGER

Eh, dear, we none on us know what 's comin' next.

MRS. HOLROYD (*getting hysterical*)

Oh, it 's too awful, it 's too awful!

BLACKMORE

You 'll disturb the children.

GRANDMOTHER

And you don't want *them* down here.

MANAGER

'E 'd no business to ha' been left, you know.

RIGLEY

An' what man, dost think, wor goin' to sit him down on his hams an' wait for a chap as wouldna say "thank yer" for his cump'ny? 'E 'd bin ready to fall out wi' a flicker o' the candle, so who dost think wor goin' ter stop when we knowed 'e on'y kep on so's to get shut on us.

MANAGER

Tha 'rt quite right, Bill, quite right. But theer you are.

RIGLEY

An' if we 'd stopped, what good would it ha' done —

MANAGER

No, 'appen not, 'appen not.

RIGLEY

For, not known —

MANAGER

I 'm sayin' nowt agen thee, neither one road nor t 'other. (*There is general silence —then, to Mrs. Holroyd*) I should think th' inquest 'll be at th' New Inn to-morrow, missis. I 'll let you know.

MRS. HOLROYD

Will there have to be an inquest?

MANAGER

Yes — there 'll have to be an inquest. Shall you want anybody in, to stop with you to-night?

MRS. HOLROYD

No.

MANAGER

Well, then, we 'd best be goin'. I 'll send my missis down first thing in the morning. It 's a bad job, a bad job, it is. You 'll be a' right then?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

MANAGER

Well, good-night then — good-night all.

ALL

Good-night. Good-night.

[*The Manager, followed by the two bearers, goes out, closing the door.*

RIGLEY

It 's like this, missis. I never should ha' gone, if he had n't wanted us to.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes, I know.

RIGLEY

'E wanted to come up by 's sen.

MRS. HOLROYD (*wearily*)

I know how it was, Mr. Rigley.

RIGLEY

Yes —

BLACKMORE

Nobody could foresee.

RIGLEY (*shaking his head*)

No. If there 's owt, missis, as you want —

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — I think there is n't anything.

RIGLEY (*after a moment*)

Well — good-night — we 've worked i' the same stall ower four years now —

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

RIGLEY

Well, good-night, missis.

MRS. HOLROYD AND BLACKMORE

Good-night.

[*The Grandmother all this time has been rocking herself to and fro, moaning and murmuring beside the dead man. When Rigley has gone Mrs. Holroyd stands staring distractedly before her. She has not yet looked at her husband.*

GRANDMOTHER

Have you got the things ready, Lizzie?

MRS. HOLROYD

What things?

GRANDMOTHER

To lay the child out.

MRS. HOLROYD (*she shudders*)

No — what?

GRANDMOTHER

Have n't you put him by a pair o' white stockings, nor a white shirt?

MRS. HOLROYD

He 's got a white cricketing shirt — but not white stockings.

GRANDMOTHER

Then he 'll have to have his father's. Let me look at the shirt, Lizzie. (*Mrs. Holroyd takes one from the dresser drawer*) This 'll never do — a cold, canvas thing wi' a turndown collar. I s'll 'ave to fetch his father's. (*Suddenly*) You don't want no other woman to touch him, to wash him and lay him out, do you?

MRS. HOLROYD (*weeping*)

No.

GRANDMOTHER

Then I 'll fetch him his father's gear. We must n't

let him set, he 'll be that heavy, bless him. (*She takes her shawl*) I shan't be more than a few minutes, an' the young fellow can stop here till I come back.

BLACKMORE

Can't I go for you, Mrs. Holroyd?

GRANDMOTHER

No. *You* could n't find the things. We 'll wash him as soon as I get back, Lizzie.

MRS. HOLROYD

All right.

[*She watches her mother-in-law go out. Then she starts, goes in the scullery for a bowl, in which she pours warm water. She takes a flannel and soap and towel. She stands, afraid to go any farther.*

BLACKMORE

Well!

MRS. HOLROYD

This is a judgment on us.

BLACKMORE

Why?

MRS. HOLROYD

On me, it is —

BLACKMORE

How?

MRS. HOLROYD

It is.

[*Blackmore shakes his head.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Yesterday you talked of murdering him.

BLACKMORE

Well!

MRS. HOLROYD

Now we 've done it.

BLACKMORE
How?

MRS. HOLROYD
He 'd have come up with the others, if he had n't felt — felt me murdering him.

BLACKMORE
But we can't help it.

MRS. HOLROYD
It 's my fault.

BLACKMORE
Don't be like that!

MRS. HOLROYD (*looking at him — then indicating her husband*) I dare n't see him.

BLACKMORE
No?

MRS. HOLROYD
I 've killed him, that is all.

BLACKMORE
No, you have n't.

MRS. HOLROYD
Yes, I have.

BLACKMORE
We could n't help it.

MRS. HOLROYD
If he had n't felt, if he had n't *known*, he would n't have stayed, he 'd have come up with the rest.

BLACKMORE
Well, and even if it was so, we can't help it now.

MRS. HOLROYD
But we 've killed him.

BLACKMORE
Ah, I 'm tired —

MRS. HOLROYD
Yes.

BLACKMORE (*after a pause*)
Shall I stay?

MRS. HOLROYD
I — I dare n't be alone with him.

BLACKMORE (*sitting down*)
No.

MRS. HOLROYD
I don't love him. Now he 's dead. I don't love him. He lies like he did yesterday.

BLACKMORE
I suppose, being dead — I don't know —

MRS. HOLROYD
I think you 'd better go.

BLACKMORE (*rising*)
Tell me.

MRS. HOLROYD
Yes.

BLACKMORE
You want me to go.

MRS. HOLROYD
No — but *do* go. (*They look at each other*)

BLACKMORE
I shall come to-morrow (*he goes out*)
[*Mrs. Holroyd stands very stiff, as if afraid of the dead man. Then she stoops down and begins to sponge his face, talking to him.*

MRS. HOLROYD
My dear, my dear — oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear — you should n't have done it. You should n't have done it. Oh — I can't bear it, for you. Why could n't I do anything for you? The

children's father — my dear — I was n't good to you. But you should n't have done this to me. Oh, dear, oh, dear! Did it hurt you? — oh, my dear, it hurt you — oh, I can't bear it. No, things are n't fair — we went wrong, my dear. I never loved you enough — I never did. What a shame for you! It was a shame. But you did n't — you didn't try. I *would* have loved you — I tried hard. What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you. You could n't help it — my dear, my dear. You could n't help it. And I can't do anything for you, and it hurt you so! (*She weeps bitterly, so her tears fall on the dead man's face; suddenly she kisses him*) My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I? (*She weeps as she wipes his face gently*)

GRANDMOTHER (*enters, puts a bundle on the table, takes off her shawl*) You 're not all by yourself?

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

GRANDMOTHER

It 's a wonder you 're not frightened. You 've not washed his face.

MRS. HOLROYD

Why should I be afraid of him — now, mother?

GRANDMOTHER (*weeping*)

Ay, poor lamb, I can't think as ever you could have had reason to be frightened of him, Lizzie.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes — once —

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, but he went wrong. An' he was a taking lad, as iver was. (*She cries pitifully*) And when I waked his father up and told him, he sat up in bed staring

over his whiskers, and said should he come up? But when I 'd managed to find the shirt and things, he was still in bed. You don't know what it is to live with a man that has no feeling. But you 've washed him, Lizzie?

MRS. HOLROYD

I was finishing his head.

GRANDMOTHER

Let me do it, child.

MRS. HOLROYD

I 'll finish that.

GRANDMOTHER

Poor lamb — poor dear lamb! Yet I would n't wish him back, Lizzie. He must ha' died peaceful, Lizzie. He seems to be smiling. He always had such a rare smile on him — not that he 's smiled much of late —

MRS. HOLROYD

I loved him for that.

GRANDMOTHER

Ay — my poor child — my poor child.

MRS. HOLROYD

He looks nice, mother.

GRANDMOTHER

I hope he made his peace with the Lord.

MRS. HOLROYD

Yes.

GRANDMOTHER

If he had n't time to make his peace with the Lord, I 've no hopes of him. Dear o' me, dear o' me. Is there another bit of flannel anywhere?

[*Mrs. Holroyd rises and brings a piece. The Grandmother begins to wash the breast of the dead man.*

GRANDMOTHER

Well, I hope you 'll be true to his children at least, Lizzie. (*Mrs. Holroyd weeps — the old woman continues her washing*) Eh — and he 's fair as a lily. Did you ever see a man with a whiter skin — and flesh as fine as the driven snow. He 's beautiful, he is, the lamb. Many 's the time I 've looked at him, and I 've felt proud of him, I have. And now he lies here. And such arms on 'im! Look at the vaccination marks, Lizzie. When I took him to be vaccinated, he had a little pink bonnet with a feather. (*Weeps*) Don't cry, my girl, don't. Sit up an' wash him a' that side, or we s'll never have him done. Oh, Lizzie!

MRS. HOLROYD (*sitting up, startled*)

What — what?

GRANDMOTHER

Look at his poor hand!

[*She holds up the right hand. The nails are bloody.*

MRS. HOLROYD

Oh, no! Oh, no! No!

[*Both women weep.*

GRANDMOTHER (*after awhile*)

We maun get on, Lizzie.

MRS. HOLROYD (*sitting up*)

I can't touch his hands.

GRANDMOTHER

But I 'm his mother — there 's nothing I could n't do for him.

MRS. HOLROYD

I don't care — I don't care.

GRANDMOTHER

Prithee, prithee, Lizzie, I don't want thee goin' off, Lizzie.

MRS. HOLROYD (*moaning*)

Oh, what shall I do!

GRANDMOTHER

Why, go thee an' get his feet washed. He 's setting stiff, and how shall we get him laid out?

[*Mrs. Holroyd, sobbing, goes, kneels at the miner's feet, and begins pulling off the great boots.*

GRANDMOTHER

There 's hardly a mark on him. Eh, what a man he is! I 've had some fine sons, Lizzie, I 've had some big men of sons.

MRS. HOLROYD

He was always a lot whiter than me. And he used to chaff me.

GRANDMOTHER

But his poor hands! I used to thank God for my children, but they 're rods o' trouble, Lizzie, they are. Unfasten his belt, child. Me mun get his things off soon, or else we s'll have such a job.

[*Mrs. Holroyd, having dragged off the boots, rises. She is weeping.*

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